

Ford's Name Missing in Speeches

Texas Says Reagan Still Its Favorite

By Walter Taylor

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AUSTIN, Tex. — There is somebody who probably could walk away with Texas' 26 electoral votes on Nov. 2.

Former California Gov. Ronald Reagan, however, finished second in the Republican sweepstakes in Kansas City, and his name will not be on the ballot.

So, Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter are left to slug it out for the state rich in electoral votes, a state key to the Democrats' victory strategy and vital to the Republicans. Neither is threatening to walk away with the state.

As usually is the case when the crowd wants the champion, the two pretenders are failing to stir much enthusiasm, and whoever eventually wins here may owe his victory to the other.

"To be frank," Fred Agnich, the President's campaign coordinator in Dallas conceded the other day, "our man isn't exciting a whole lot of people. But then, neither is Carter.

"IF WE WIN, to a large extent it may be because of an overwhelming concern among Texans about what Jimmy Carter, or any Democrat, would do, coupled with a wild-spending Democratic Congress."

When expressed in private conversation, the Democratic perspective on the two candidates does not differ greatly.

"We're likely to pull it off this time," said Billie Carr, the crusty Democratic national-committee woman from Texas and a leader of the state party's liberal faction.

"I'm afraid, though, it doesn't have a lot to do with Jimmy Carter. The people just are ready for a change."

Reagan, who swamped Ford in the Texas primary last May, winning all 100 of the state's convention delegates, clearly retains his popularity among conservatives of both parties here.

He was trotted around the state last week by Republican leaders who evidently hope that some of his magic with Texas voters will rub off on the national ticket and on local GOP candidates as well.

REAGAN, WHO WAS paid to make the tour, drew wildly enthusiastic crowds in Dallas, Houston and other parts of the states.

But while the Californian was free with his criticism of Carter and the Democrats, he evidently still finds it difficult to say anything positive about the man against whom he campaigned for eight months. In speeches in Dallas and Houston, in fact, he mentioned Ford's name a total of only five times, and two were references to the President's debate blunder about Eastern Europe.

Nevertheless, Reagan generally is considered one of the President's biggest assets in the campaign for Texas, a race that thus far has been more a contest between surrogates than the principles themselves.

"Ford is the beneficiary of more Republican enthusiasm than ever before because of Ronald Reagan," said Ronald Kessler, Democratic chairman in Dallas.

With or without Reagan's help, Ford would appear to have little chance to win this state and its important bloc of electoral votes — at least not on paper.

BY VIRTUALLY every standard, Texas is a state totally dominated by the Democratic party. Its top state officials are Democrats and traditionally have been. Of its 24 members of the House, all but three are Democrats.

In three of the past four presidential elections, the Democrats have carried the state. The exception, of course, was the McGovern debacle of 1972.

Texas was, after all, the home of "Cactus Jack" Garner, Sam Rayburn and Lyndon B. Johnson. Even the state's most influential Republican, former Treasury Secretary John Connally, once was a Democrat.

The statistics notwithstanding, Republicans believe Ford can win here, and even the most partisan Democrats do not completely discount that possibility.

"It's very, very close — everybody

feels it," said Peter J. O'Donnell, a former state GOP chairman and Ford's deputy-campaign manager.

Neither side would make available its polling data. But several Democratic officials said they have been told privately by Carter headquarters in Atlanta that the former Georgia governor currently holds a six to 10 percentage point lead here.

Republican officials, without providing any evidence of their own, sharply disputed such claims. O'Donnell conceded that Ford probably is trailing but insisted that the Democratic lead had been cut to "only a point or two."

The truth, as noted by the Houston Chronicle the other day, probably lies somewhere in between, which would mean Carter is maintaining a slight edge, but certainly not an insurmountable one, with two weeks to go in the campaign.

After virtually ignoring the state since their party conventions, there are indications that both sides are gearing up for a last-minute push in Texas. Besides Reagan, the Ford camp in recent days has brought such Republican luminaries as Barry Goldwater and CIA Director George Bush, himself a Texan, into the state.

Ford visited here 10 days ago for the first time since his nomination in August, attending the Texas-Oklahoma football game in Dallas and then rode through the streets of the city in an open-topped limousine. He has announced that he will return to the state during the last week of the campaign.

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CONNALLY, FORD'S campaign manager for the state also has returned to begin an eleventh-hour pitch for the President. Until now, most of his campaigning has focused in other parts of the country.

Carter, meanwhile, has twice sent his running mate, Walter F. Mondale, to Texas, and various members of the Carter family have been popping in and out of the state in recent days.

Benefitting from what appears to be the most unified state party in years, Carter also plans this week to blitz the key rural areas of the state with a phalanx of Democratic state officials, headed by Gov. Dolph Briscoe.

Officials in both camps indicated they also may pour additional money into the state, where expenditures until now have been meager, even by this year's highly regulated spending standards. Originally, the Democrats had earmarked only \$175,000 for Texas, the Republicans, \$130,000.

The key to Ford's chances here lies in his ability — and that of his supporters — to convince voters that his credentials regarding fiscal conservatism, national defense and other issues of particular concern to conservatives are better than those of Carter.

RONALD REAGAN'S popularity in the state — and the fact that thousands of Democrats "crossed over" to vote for him in the primary against Ford . . . is evidence of the prevailing political philosophy here, a philosophy that is not fully reflected by the Democratic successes of past years.

Richard M. Nixon's one-million-plus margin over McGovern in 1972 and the combined vote for Nixon and Alabama Gov. George Wallace in 1968 (545,000 more than Hubert Humphrey attracted) is further evidence that philosophy can be more important than party label here.

Thus, Ford's supporters have attempted to attack Carter for statements that would appear to make him more liberal than Ford on such issues as gun control, right-to-work laws, defense spending and energy policy.

The Democratic strategy here is to emphasize Carter's Southern ties (though most Democrats here do not identify with the "Cotton South"), his record as governor of Georgia (which Carter supporters maintain demonstrates his fiscal conservatism and his desire to reduce government bureaucracy) and his support of agricultural and small business interests.

"WE'RE STRESSING the fact that President Ford is an insider who hasn't done anything to stop deficit spending," said Carter campaign manager, Chuck Parrish.

After easily winning the Democratic primary here against the favorite-son challenge of Sen. Lloyd Benson, Carter began the fall campaign with what generally was considered a commanding lead. But Democrats acknowledge that it began to erode steadily following Carter's controversial interview with Playboy magazine and his statement about increasing taxes for families above the median income.

The Playboy interview "was the turning point for us," O'Donnell said. "He just hurt himself terribly with that."

ONE GAUGE OF the interview's impact on Texas, O'Donnell said, was last week's endorsement of Ford by the Rev. W. A. Criswell, pastor of the 19,000-member First Baptist Church of Dallas and an unofficial spokesman of many Southern Baptist fundamentalists.

In endorsing Ford, Criswell specifically criticized Carter for granting an interview to the girlie magazine.

Carter is himself a Southern Baptist, the predominant religion in Texas. Criswell's church has the largest fundamentalist congregation in the state.

Democratic officials conceded that Carter's mistakes had cost him support here. They asserted, however, that subsequent errors by the President have overshadowed those mistakes and that the momentum has shifted back to Carter.

Parrish, an Atlantan Carter exported here to head his Texas campaign, characterized Ford's statement on Eastern Europe as a "second turning point" in the race.